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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND AFERNANDEZ,
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TAGS: KMDR PREL KPAO OPRC SY

SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Assad/Annan, Syria/Qatar,
Syria/PLO, Baker/Mouallem, European Peace Initiative, OIC Meeting
(11/17-19)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers reported that President Asad received a telephone call from UN SecGen Kofi Annan during which they reviewed political developments in Lebanon and Iraq. Papers also reported President Asad's meeting with Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassem Bin Jabr Al Thani, who conveyed a letter from the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani. Talks dealt with development of the intra-Palestinian dialogue and the necessity of enhancing Palestinian national unity. President Asad also received a telephone call from Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, focusing on Palestinian developments and the intra-Palestinian dialogue.

Papers also featured a New York Times report saying that former US Secretary of State James Baker met with Syrian Foreign Minister

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Walid Mouallem in Washington in September to discuss cooperation with the United States.

Papers also reported that Information Minister Mohsen Bilal met in Madrid with Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos, who expressed hope that the peace initiative by France, Spain and Italy will succeed, indicating that he will contact the foreign ministers of the United States, Britain, the Netherlands and Germany to acquaint them with the mechanisms and ideas that form the basis of the initiative, which is scheduled to be proposed on Dec. 14 to the European Union with the aim of reviving the peace process in the region.

Papers also reported a meeting by the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Executive Committee, which decided to break the siege on Palestinians and to act on the international level to end the siege. In their meeting on Nov. 18 in Jeddah, the OIC foreign ministers called for actual commitment to the decisions of the OIC summit with regard to boycott of Israeli companies. In their final statement, the ministers condemned Israel for the massacre in Bait Hanoun and for the ongoing slaughter of the Palestinian people. The statement denounced the U.S. veto that blocked a UN Security Council resolution on the massacre. Earlier, Syria's representative at the meeting, Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Miqdad, read a statement

stressing that the message which should be sent by the meeting to Israel and those who support its aggression and hinder international legitimacy, is that such Israeli crimes will be punished economically and politically. He underlined that the Israeli occupation of Arab territories in Palestine, the Golan, and Shebaa Farms is the main reason for the current violence in the Middle East.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad receives a telephone call from UN SecGen Kofi Annan on latest developments in Lebanon and Iraq" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/19)

"Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos: Syria is the most important factor in the peace process in the Middle East" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 11/19)

"The Organization of Islamic Conference Executive Committee decides to break the siege imposed on Palestinians and to act on an international level to end the siege. Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Miqdad: Israel and those who support its aggression hinder international legitimacy" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/19)

"Former US Secretary of State James Baker discusses the situation in Iraq with senior Syrian Officials" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/19)

"President Asad receives a phone call from Mahmoud Abbas and a letter from Qatar's Emir and reviews with Sheikh Hamad developments in the Palestinian dialogue and coordination between Syria and Qatar" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/18)

"An official source denies accusation that Syria is providing Somali militia with arms" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/17)

"After failure to stop the missiles of the resistance, Israel adopts harsher measures. Haniya: Israel rejected the European peace

initiative because Israel doesn't seek peace" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/8)

"Chairman of the Belgian Senate: Syria assumes an important and main role in the Middle East. Spanish Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Bernardino Leon briefs Minister Bilal on Spanish moves and the European peace initiative" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/8)

"Al-Dari considers the memorandum of arrest illegal. The government: It is an investigation, not an arrest. Bush: No pull-out from Iraq; we benefited from Vietnam lessons" (Government-owned Tishreen, 11/18)

"New scandal for February 14th team in Lebanon: Israel participated in drafting the resolution on formation of international tribunal for Al-Hariri assassination" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/17)

"Israel rejects the European peace initiative. Prodi calls on the US administration to engage in dialogue with Syria" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 11/17)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"The Enemies of Peace"

Isam Dari, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (11/18): "Without any hesitation, Israel rejected the new European peace initiative and considered it nonexistent.

"Israeli rejection, accompanied by American tepidity toward the initiative, came so simply, before the content of the initiative was seen and before Olmert's government received a copy.

"Three big European countries -- Spain, France, and Italy -- have announced an initiative that is based initially on ending violence and then reviving the peace process through an international conference that might take a form different from that of the Madrid conference 15 years ago. But the enemies of peace are trying to nip this initiative in the bud, just as they tried to thwart the Madrid conference before, during, and after its convocation....

"It is no exaggeration to say that peace causes alarm and panic among Israelis, who will be unable to accept the idea of a just and comprehensive peace so long as they build their policies and positions on Talmudic myths that basically talk about a pure Jewish

state extending from the Nile to the Euphrates and about God's chosen people, who must be the masters, while all other peoples on earth are tools and slaves implementing the wishes of this people, which God chose -- God forbid -- to rule, repress, kill, commit vice, practice terrorism, and violate women and children, as written in their Talmud....

"If Israel rejects even the initiative of its only strategic ally in the world, should anyone be astonished that it rejects the European initiative before learning its content?

"What is strange, however, is the claim by the Tel Aviv rulers that they are peace advocates and that they are searching for a partner. They say that it takes two to tango, as if they were at a party. The unquestionable fact is that they are enemies of peace, advocates of war and destruction, and undisputed leaders of terrorism.

"The ball is no longer in the Israeli court, as no one pins hopes on the Israelis. The ball is in the European and American court. If the EU and the sponsors of the new initiative are serious in their endeavors to achieve peace and are eager to end the wars and terrorism from which the region is suffering, they know who is standing in the way of peace and who is rejecting the peace plans. And they have the tools that enable them to defend their initiative and a just and comprehensive peace.

"Bolton Must Be Removed"

Samir al-Shibani, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (11/18): "Many observers believe Rumsfeld's fall will mark the beginning of the disintegration of neoconservatives, who fill the world with chaos, wars, and tensions and violate all international laws and conventions to establish their hostile empire even at the cost of the death of millions of peoples and the destruction of many countries, and even continents.

"In light of John Bolton's hostile attitude toward the United Nations, which represents the whole world, Bolton's removal from his post becomes more than necessary both for the American voter and for every human on earth because his tenure threatens the civilized

human experience with a destructive setback...."

"Is He still Optimistic?"

Dr. Sa'id Musallam, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (11/17): "US General John Abizaid said that he is still optimistic that Americans are able to bring peace to Iraq....

"Abizaid asserted that the US Administration has no intention of setting a timetable for withdrawal from Iraq, despite Baker's recommendations and Blair's advice.... This shows that calls for dialogue with Iraq's neighbors to achieve stability in Iraq are intended to help provide a safe environment for the stay of US troops, reduce the painful blows they are taking, and minimize their human losses....

"Iraq's neighbors work for a solution in Iraq outside the scenario of the continuation of the occupation...."

Corbin